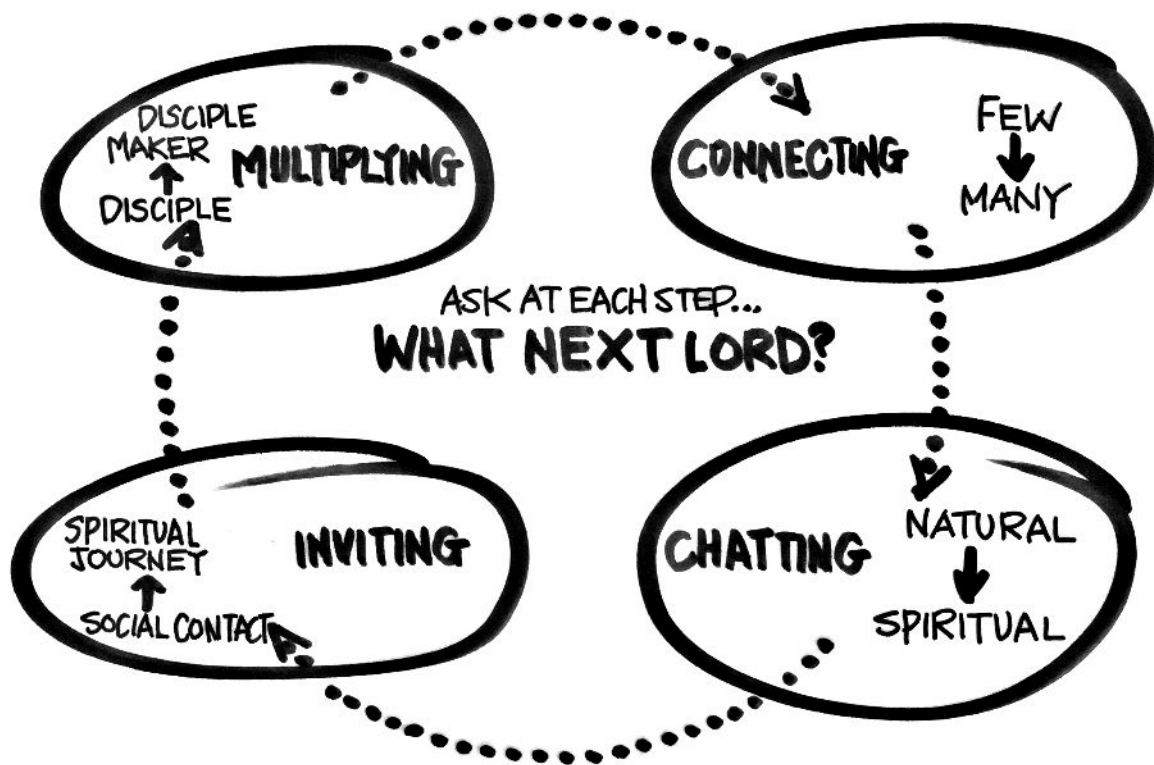


DISCIPLE MAKER'S JOURNEY



Premise

- We are all called to be disciple-makers. Matt 28:19-20. This is Jesus' command to his disciples, which is then passed on to each generation of subsequent disciples, including us.
- Making disciples starts with winning people to Christ, not simply helping existing Christians to maturity
- Most of don't understand the process of making disciples, or the specific challenges and sticking points that stop us. This tool is designed to help us embrace the challenges as adventures, and remove the sticking points so we can all have the joy of being fruitful.
- We understand that there are people who are open to the gospel at this time and we need to find them. We call them people of peace, from the Luke 10 mission of the disciples. They are identified by the fact that they like us, listen to us, invite us into more relationship, and may even want to serve us. I use the phrase that they are people who 'lean in' to relationship and conversation with us.
- The following 4 stages of the disciple-makers journey are presented in a chronological logical fashion. We know that nothing ever happens like that, and that in real life it's messy, often unplanned, and nothing quite goes as you expect it to. So don't get hung up on the clinical approach to these 4 stages. It's designed to help you be proactive and not just reactive.

4 stages of the Disciple-makers journey

1. **Connecting.** We connect with people all the time wherever we are – at work, in our streets, at the school gates, in the gym etc. Why not be intentional and prolific with these connections. Because the truth is we need to make dozens if not hundreds of connections if we are to find people of peace (PoPs). The challenge, or if you like the journey within the journey, is to go from few to many connections. Too many of us think that the key to successfully winning people to Christ is to invest in a few relationships over many years and hope that they become open to Christ. Sadly this doesn't often happen. Unless we have a way of figuring out who might be a PoP, then we may have some lovely friendships, but never have the joy of leading anyone to Christ, and we will miss the many who are searching. Once we have begun to suspect who the possible PoPs are, then we will start to invest more in the few. The simplest way to make a connection is to say Hi!

2. **Chatting.** Not rocket science is it! But when we get into conversation we are starting to pick up all sorts of signals. Are they interested? Do they like us? Are they listening to what we have to say?

The challenge at this stage is moving from natural to spiritual conversation. For many of us this is profoundly difficult, and we have made many faltering, awkward attempts to do this. There are many ways of introducing spiritual topics to the conversation, like talking about going to Church on Sundays, God answering your prayers, but best of all is sharing your faith story.

Learning to do this in a natural and non-creaky way is both an art and a skill. There are many ways of doing this; the one I like best is to simply think about your story in 6 words. For example mine are 'Buried alive. Answered prayer. On fire'. From these 6 words I build my story learning to tell it vividly, confidently, and creatively. The 6 words form a series of pegs on which I hang my story. I have 2 and 5 minute versions depending on the context. Because your story is your story no one can argue with it. That's why it's so powerful. It's easy to bring our story in to pretty much any conversation. I usually ask people lots about themselves. I'm genuinely interested, but I also hope that at some point they will ask me something about me. Somewhere along the line I can usually say something like, '...You know what, ...can I tell you my story?' If they say yes, then I have permission and don't need to feel bad about telling it. Once I have told my story, it's easy to see if they are 'leaning in' or not. If they are then I can follow it up with questions about their experience of faith, church, or whatever spiritual topic seems appropriate. At the centre of most of our stories is a moment or process when we came to understand who Jesus is and what he has done. This is a good opportunity to talk about the gospel, as it was explained to us. I sometimes use a 4 points wristband (www.the4points.com) to help me explain the essence of the gospel.

3. **Inviting.** By now you are getting a good idea who your people of peace are, certainly enough of an idea to risk inviting them to something. Initially the invitation is to greater relationship, so is likely to be to some kind of social contact in a neutral setting, such as a coffee shop or pub, or possibly to a meal in your home. It's important that the relationship of trust and friendship grows and allows more free and frequent spiritual conversations (as well as all the usual stuff of life). The challenge will be in taking the friend from social contact to spiritual journey. Most people don't come to Christ via an event, though some do. For most it's a process of questioning, toe dipping, and taking small steps in the direction of personal faith. So we need to create those stepping-stones to faith so we can help someone take those small steps that lead to a big life change.

There are many ways of doing this, but it's probably needs to be an invitation to a structured process that allows people to first have a taster to see if they like it, and then to commit to whatever that process and content consists of. Typically the following work well as stepping-stones to faith.

Alpha, Christianity Explored, The Story of God, and Seven Signs in John's Gospel are all spiritual journey tools that I have used. If you are inviting people to something like this tell them what to expect, leave as few surprises as possible.

<https://alpha.org>

<https://christianityexplored.org>

<https://www.caesarkalinowski.com/story-of-god-resources/>

<https://www.dbsguide.org/signs-of-john-for-seekers/>

4. **Multiplied.** It might at first seem strange to think about going straight from inviting to multiplying disciples. But I believe as soon as we start to engage with PoPs we are entering a discipling relationship – they just don't know it yet. They are watching your life, they are learning about your priorities, your lifestyle, your relationship, the way you talk, the way you deal with frustration and anger, and above all about your relationship with Jesus. You are discipling them. By the time they commit to the stepping-stones of faith, they are well on the way. They may not have crossed the line of salvation (though that is often difficult to define), but they are following and you are leading. So by the time they do commit their lives to Christ, you need to be thinking about how they can be influencing their own peer group, family, neighbours, work colleagues etc.

The challenge is to help them grow from disciple to disciple-maker, and so enter the disciple-makers journey. At this stage of their Christian life they will have many family members and friends who don't know God. And it's wonderful to see them having impact on them, leading them to Christ. They become a disciple-maker and you become a multiplier.

What next Lord? The 'what next Lord?' in the centre of the disciple-makers journey is a reminder that we need never be stuck. Sometimes we feel we have taken a particular relationship so far and don't know what to do next. It feels stuck at a certain level and we aren't sure if it has the capacity to go further. The 'what next?' questions is such a simple idea, but one that unsticks everything. With each person that we are engaged with, when we aren't sure what to do next we just ask God, 'What next Lord with this person?' I find it amazing that in most situations something almost immediately pops into our mind. Give it a go, it might just be God. If not – have fun trying it anyway! Sooner or later we will discover if they are someone who wants to go all the way or whether they only want to take it so far. Whatever they decide is fine, we need to respect that and wait to see if the situation changes in the future, as it often does.

People often ask 'well am I meant just to drop relationships where the person has, by their actions, said 'thus far and no further''. No, they are still your friend. But what will change is the level of investment of time in that relationship. Jesus only did what he saw the Father doing. He gave his best time to those who wanted to go all the way with him (the 12 disciples). He invested in other relationships, but not to the same level. We want to be like Jesus.

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